

Circle of Friends, alleviating loneliness among older adults

Anu Jansson, PhD

Director of Development and Participation
The Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older People

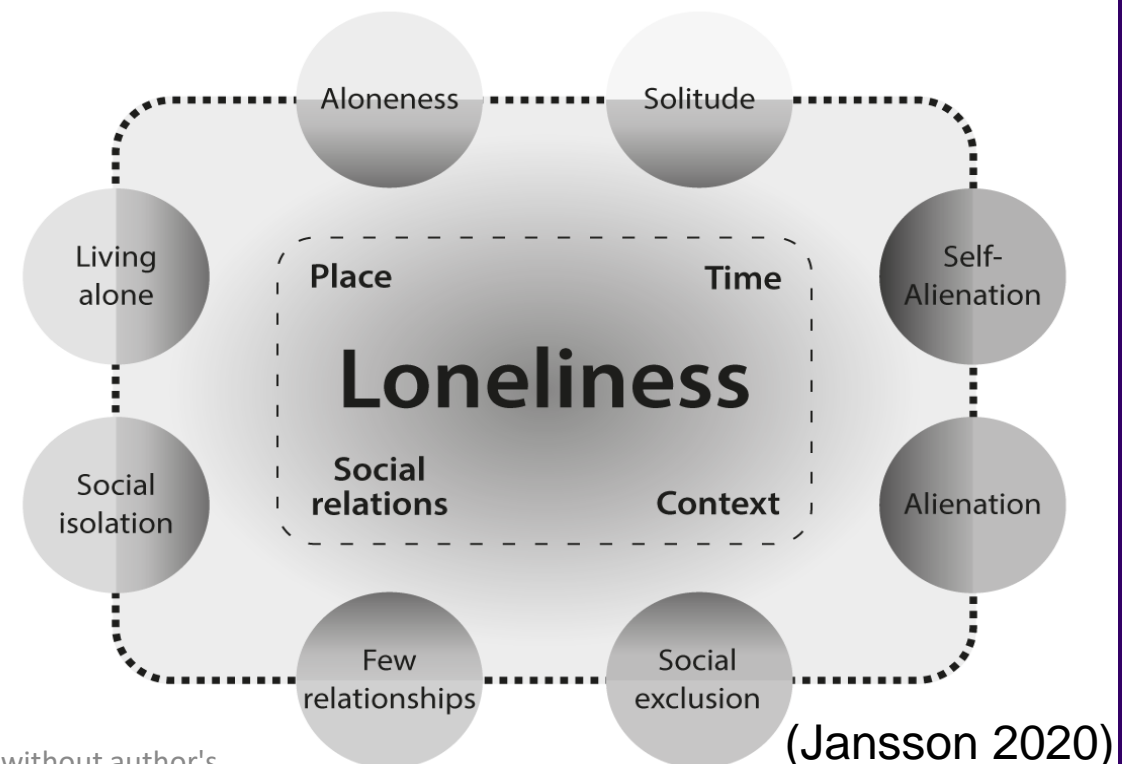
Research coordinator
RECETAS-project, University of Helsinki



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How do we understand loneliness in the Circle of Friends?

- We understand the complexity and multidimensional nature of loneliness
- Circle of Friends is addressing loneliness – not social isolation, or people who are living alone, but not lonely
- The group is focused on loneliness, participants' distressing feelings and on the gap between desired or expected and actual levels of social interaction (Perlman and Peplau 1982, Victor et al. 2009)
- A participant in the group may feel lonely, even if this person is social active (in objective evaluation) (Victor et al. 2009)
- Loneliness is related in time, place, social relations and context (for example cultural context) along the life course of the older adults
- People who are suffering from existential loneliness, do not necessarily benefit from expanding their social network (Jansson et al. 2021)



(Jansson 2020)



What is the (facilitated) Circle of Friends[®] group?



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The aim is to alleviate loneliness.

The group is for the older adults who experience loneliness

The group is made up of six to ten people.

Eight participants is an ideal group size in Circle of Friends

The group is closed.

No more people are added to the group once the group process has begun.

The group meets for a specified period with facilitators.

Each session is usually two hours long. The group meets every week at the same time for a total of 12 times, i.e., for 12 weeks.

The group has a pair of facilitators.

Both facilitators have Circle of Friends training. They take part in all the groups sessions.

What do we know about the effectiveness of the Circle of Friends?

In RCT, Circle of Friends

- Improved lonely older adults' health and cognition (Pitkälä et al. 2009; Routasalo et al. 2009; Pitkälä et al. 2011)
- Decreased the use of healthcare services and reduced mortality among the participants (Pitkälä et al. 2009)

According to the ten-year follow-up

- 9/10 of the participants felt that their loneliness had been alleviated in the group (Jansson et al. 2018)
- Of the groups, 60 % continue meetings on their own
- The longest, the group has continued independent meetings for 8 years, an average of 2 years (without the facilitation of social and health professionals)

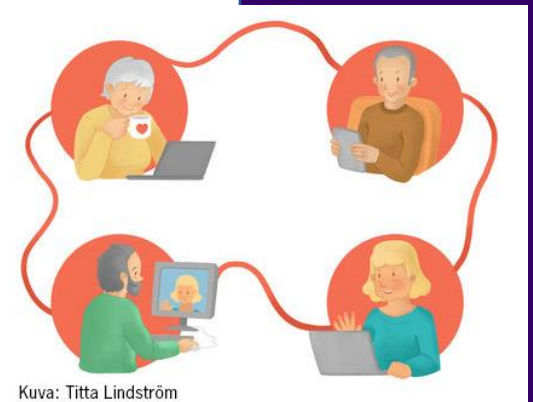
Feasibility in other cultural contexts

- According to preliminary results of the implementation in the Missouri area, USA, meetings also seem to be feasible in other countries and cultural contexts (Berg-Weger & Morley 2020)
- It has been suggested to be the only form of intervention having effectiveness in physiological mechanisms and physical-health outcomes (Hawkey & Cacioppo 2010)

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Kuva: Titta Lindström

What do we know about the dissemination of the Circle of Friends?

- Circle of Friends is well organized and have motivated and professional staff: 4 full-time coordinators, 10 part-time trainers
- Circle of Friends participants in Finland are
 - home-dwelling
 - residents in the long-term care facilities (nursing homes and assisted living facilities)
 - people with cognitive decline (MMSE at least 15)
 - deaf people using sign language
- Of the facilitators, 65 % are social and health care professionals, 35 % volunteers (Circle of Friends statistics 2022)
- During COVID-19 we have modified successfully the original face-to-face Circle of Friends model into online groups (Jansson A & Pitkälä K. 2021). *“This is like having a coffee break at the same table, even if we are separated from each other”* (woman, 80, during COVID-19 in Circle of Friends)

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Trained Circle of Friends facilitators in Finland

1200

Participants in Circle of Friends groups in Finland

12000

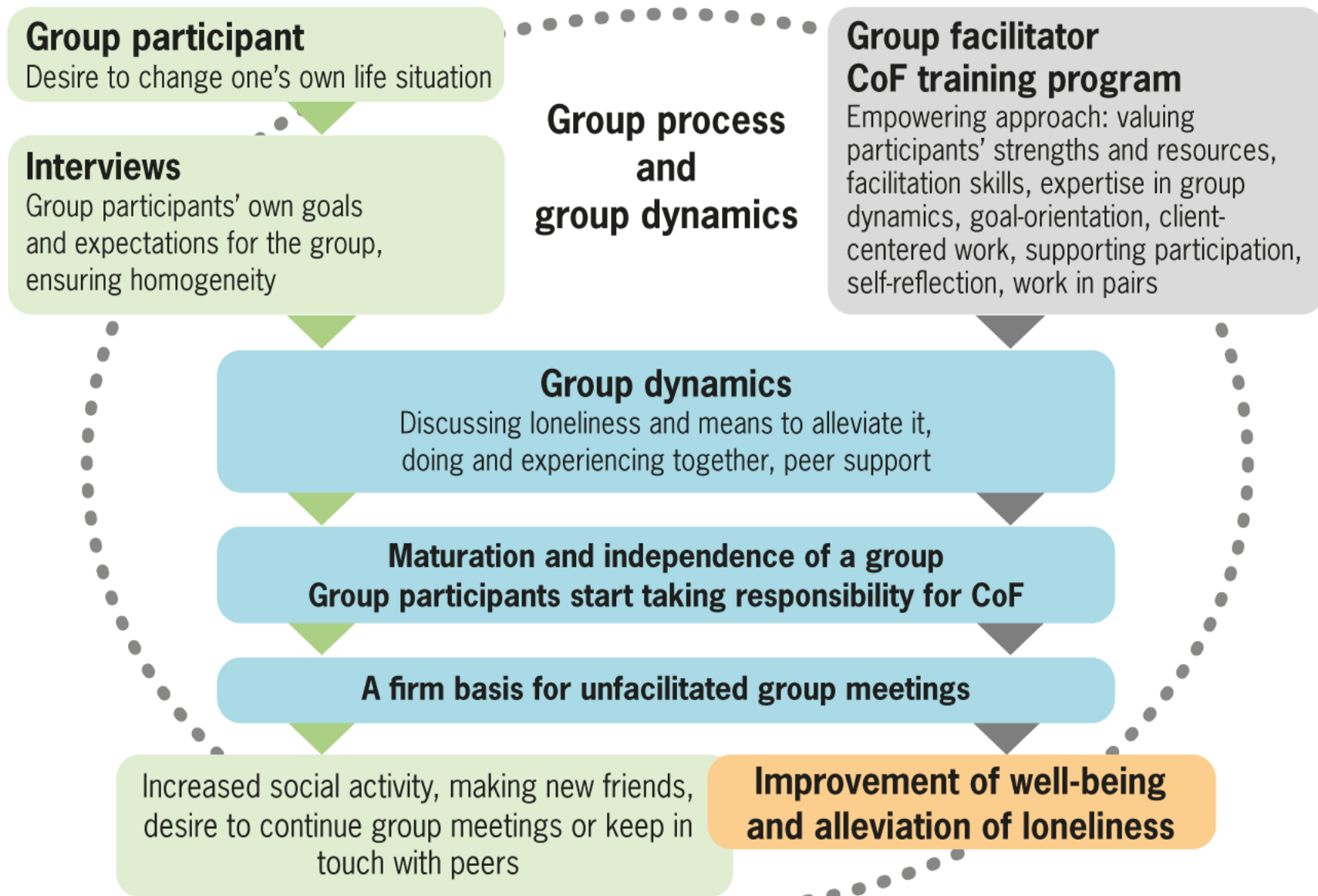


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The main elements of Circle of Friends in a group process



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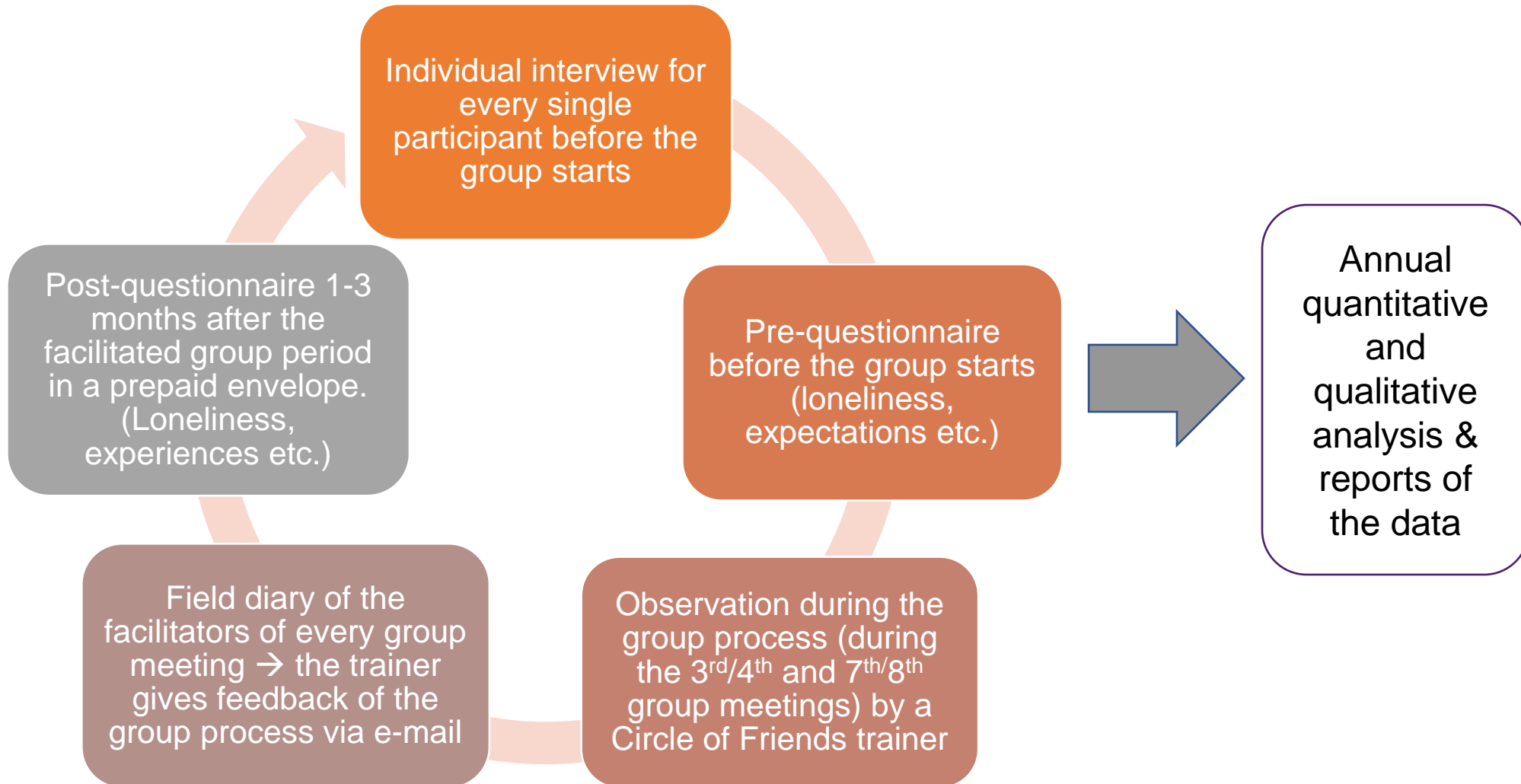
Circle of Friends group process

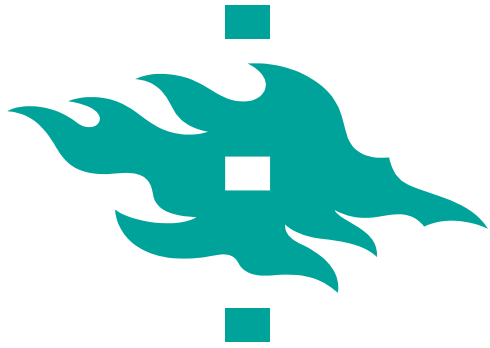




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How do we measure the Circle of Friends groups?





What's new?

Circle of Friends in the RECETAS project

- RECETAS is an EU-funded project (2021-2026) that will test and evaluate nature-based social prescribing (NBSP) across Europe, Latin America and Australia
- We ask: can the prescription of social activities in natural spaces reduce feelings of loneliness and improve quality of life in urban contexts?
- RECETAS is carrying out three observational studies and three randomized controlled trials in six cities worldwide: Barcelona, Marseille, Prague, Helsinki, Cuenca (Ecuador) and Melbourne.
- RECETAS will use the key elements of group process studied in Circle of Friends in different project sites.
- University of Helsinki and Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older people have trained facilitators in different project sites how to use the key elements of Circle of Friends.



More information:
recetasproject.eu



RECETAS

TESTING ACTIONS FOR SOCIAL
PRESCRIBING IN NATURAL SPACES

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Thank you so much!



Please contact:

Anu Jansson

anu.jansson@vtkl.fi

+358 50 4022 529

 @JanssonAnu

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